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December 1983

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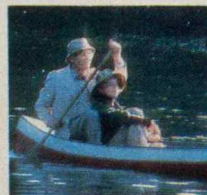
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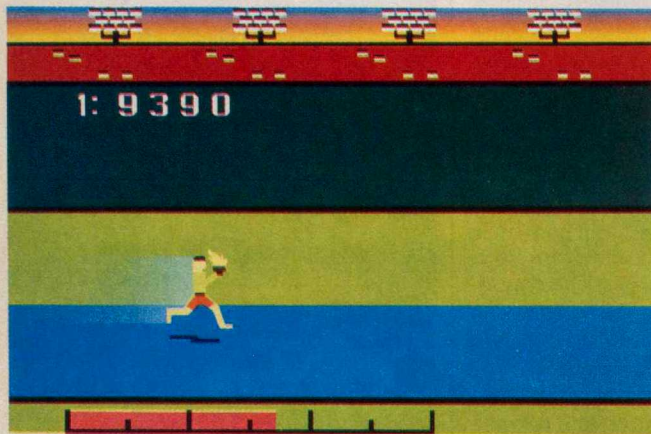
Arcade Alley

A Critical Look at Video Games

by Bill Kunkel & Arnie Katz



Super Gifts for Gamers



'Tis the season to be jolly here at "Arcade Alley," so we've taken time out from game-playing to do our annual round of holiday shopping. Like us, you probably have people on your list who are tough to pick gifts for, so this column is devoted to a quartet of new games that are guaranteed to please your home-arcading friends.

Perhaps the greatest compliment a reviewer can pay **Decathlon** (Activision/Atari 2600)—a monumental new cartridge by David Crane—is simply to describe it. Heralded by the Olympic music theme, the traditional torch-bearing runner jogs across the track as night lights glow and the crowd cheers to begin the festivities. What follows is an absolute triumph of imaginative programming—a complete video simulation of the 10 events which comprise the Olympic decathlon.

Up to four gamers can participate in this simulation of one of the most grueling tests in all of sports. There are video versions of various running events and such field favorites as the javelin, pole vault, shot put, and discus. And the movement system is unique: the home arcader moves his character by whipping the joystick shaft left and right as rapidly as possible. The faster you move the stick, the faster the digital Olympian shakes his booty. After hours of finger-cracking strain, the proprietors of "Arcade Alley" have developed a new technique that maximizes game performance while helping players save valuable fingers for later use.

Just form a "V" symbol (or peace sign), slip the joystick shaft between your index and middle fingers, and tap it back and forth as fast as desired. This should reduce wear and tear on the joystick as well, and that is a sensible precaution with this title.

A meter at the bottom of the playfield fluctuates to track current speed, and with practice, most players will be able to get their surrogate runner hustling along at a respectable clip. This is important because two of the three running events are dashes which must be run at top speed from start to finish, though the 1500-meter race requires strategy. Our advice is to move along at a fairly gentle pace for the first 1300 meters and then gear up for a final all-out burst to the wire.

The heaving events—javelin, shot put, and discus—call for some finesse. Start the approach slowly, and then increase speed so that the electronic athlete is traveling at top speed when he reaches the line. This gives your toss the maximum possible benefit due to momentum.

Many will find the jumping events hardest to master. As in real-life tournaments, the bar in the pole-vault and high-jump events starts low and is raised bit by bit as rounds of competition are completed. In the game, each player has three chances to clear the bar at the current height. A successful jump or vault causes the bar to rise .02 meters.

Even a year ago, who could've imag-



Activision has turned the 10 events of the Olympic 'Decathlon' into a rich and versatile cartridge by that name (left). Free Fall Associates' 'Murder on the Zinderneuf' (above) really puts the mind to work.

ined a single 2600-compatible cartridge with 10 events? "Decathlon" is a masterpiece.

Tutenkham (Parker Brothers/Atari 2600) is a superb translation of Stern's coin-op oddity—an adventure game for the 2600 and, soon, for other popular vid-game and computer systems as well. While the 2600 edition is hardly a visual clone of the original, its pared-down graphics are attractive and serviceable. More important, the play-action is fascinating enough to hook the player the first time and subtle enough to invite frequent replays.

The arcader starts with three explorers and an equal number of "laser flashes," which wipe the screen clear of all antagonistic beasts. This powerful weapon must be used with discretion, however: even Lloyds of London wouldn't give a farthing for an explorer who enters chamber four on level three without a laser flash in reserve. The explorer has the additional protection of a gun, but he can fire only horizontally and dangers approaching from directly above or below pose a lethal threat.

The playfield scrolls vertically, sending the archaeologist further into the depths of the Egyptian tomb. A good sense of direction is a major asset, for the explorer moves along secret passageways that transport him through walls. You must scoop up all the hidden treasures while avoiding a hideous fate at the hands of the endlessly spawning monsters that infest the labyrinth. It is vital to locate virtually

all the treasures. If you miss more than one per level, the key at the bottom of the tomb won't operate.

"Tutenkham" is a wonderful blend of puzzle-solving and hand-eye challenge, and is enhanced by lush colors, appropriately exotic music, and an Arabian-style score marker. Beginners will be lucky to make it through the first four chambers. Passing this initial test qualifies the explorer to run the same gauntlet again at a higher level of difficulty. "Tutenkham" is video game royalty.

At the onset of **Stellar 7** (Software Entertainment Co./Apple II/48K disk), Gir Draxon—Supreme Overlord of the Arcturan Empire—has faked the Terran Federation out of its boots. While Earth's space fleet heads into the infinite on a wild goose chase, the invaders from Arcturus are hopping from system to system using a recently discovered network of warplinks. Draxon intends to convey an assault force to Titan (a moon of Saturn) and then invade our planet from there.

Our side's last chance is an experimental armored vehicle called Raven, and it's the gamer's mission to guide Raven through each of the seven warplinks and successfully confront the Arcturan strongman in his lair. Each warplink station is a moon or planet crawling with all kinds of Arcturan weapons, so only those commanders who combine cunning tactics with skillful use of Raven's numerous capabilities can hope to survive to the end.

The playscreen shows the main display of the Raven's control panel, most of which is occupied by a view out the front window. The graphics are executed in multi-colored linework that is reminiscent of vector graphics games like "Battlezone" and "Tempest." Above the viewing monitor from left to right are the score counter, the Inviso cloak instrument, a window that identifies the current sector location, and a radar-like Gravitic Scope. Directly below the Scope at the extreme right are two vertical calibrated bars which show the power left for the Protonic Shields and in the Energy Bank.

The gamer steers using a joystick or keyboard. Button "O" fires the cannon—which can discharge a volley of two blasts, "Return" activates the Inviso Cloak, "Z" produces a zoom-lens effect, and "F" makes potential targets stand out on the Gravitic Scope.


The Arcturan arsenal is too huge and varied to catalog here. The disk includes a briefing manual which, though purposefully sketchy in some areas, furnishes lots of valuable information about the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy vehicles. The disk also holds a high-score vanity board which remains in memory even when the game is removed from the drive.

"Stellar 7" is a severe test for even the most skillful home arcaders, and its varied action makes it a particularly satisfying game for solo players.

Assume the identity of one of eight famous detectives to solve the **Murder on the Zinderneuf** (Electronic Arts/Atari Computers/32K disk)—a 1930s-style murder mystery set on a trans-Atlantic dirigible flight. One of the sixteen passengers has been killed and, as the sleuth, you must roam the skyship and be on the alert for clues and opportunities to question the fifteen suspects.

There is a definite arcade element—it takes some joystick jiggling to make sure your detective meets only the suspects you want to interrogate—but "Murder on the Zinderneuf" is mostly a brain-stretcher. To identify the killer and build a case that can stick in court before the mighty craft docks requires clear, logical thinking and (possibly) a dash of good fortune. One of the best aspects is that the game can be played over and over again: it generates a different mystery each time, with an excellent chance that most of what happens will make some kind of sense.

As we go to press, "Murder on the Zinderneuf" is compatible only with the Atari, but should be available in versions for many of the other popular microcomputers in time for gift-giving. Though the other versions may not equal the visual statement of the Atari edition, there's little reason to believe that Electronic Arts will do less than its usual outstanding job.

"Murder on the Zinderneuf" is as entertaining as it is innovative, and it's one of the most distinctive titles to be published this year. 

Coming Next Month!

'Arcade Alley' is pleased to announce that starting next month, for the next two columns, we will be presenting the 1984 Arcade Awards. Next month's column will be on video-game cartridges, and the one after that will be on computer software.

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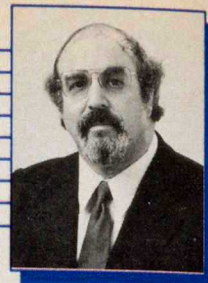
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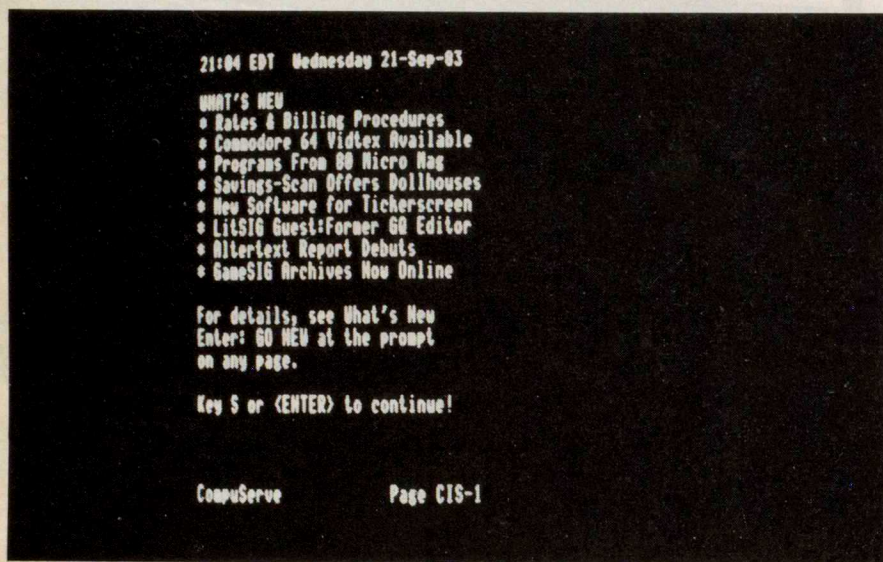
Computer Ease

The Human Interface

by Ivan Berger



Chatting on CompuServe



This is what a 'menu' of material looks like on CompuServe.

CompuServe is an information super-market, or maybe "department store" would be a better image. It is one of two major on-line databank services open to anyone with a computer or terminal, a modem for phone communication, and a few bucks to spend on satisfying his curiosity. (The other major databank service is the Source.) So whether you want to communicate—directly or indirectly—with people, or prefer the hermitic solitude of communing only with machines, you'll probably find something (or someone) there to interest, entertain, and assist you.

A terminal is just a box with a keyboard, a video screen (or printer), and a serial communications port for talking to computers, modems, or other devices. Working in "full duplex" mode, your typed message goes out through the port and is echoed back by the device receiving it—so what you see on your screen confirms that your keyboard input made it to the other end of the line and back. Your screen also displays information sent by the device at the other end.

Computers usually contain the same components, but are more complex. They're also normally self-contained: what you type in goes on the screen

Ivan Berger is technical editor of Audio Magazine.

(unless the computer is programmed to do something different), and whatever else you see on the screen was generated inside that same computer. Making your computer do a terminal's job requires a special program—I use Radio Shack's Vidtex, for example, though I've ordered CompuServe's more elaborate program.

There are two ways to sign on to a databank service. I sign on the old-fashioned way: fire up the Vidtex program, dial CompuServe's local access number, wait until I hear a beep in the receiver, then lay the receiver down in the cups of my acoustic-coupler modem and press "Break" on my keyboard. CompuServe then asks me for an ID number which it echoes on my screen, and for a password, which it doesn't echo. The ID number is a public code with which other system users can address me. The password isn't echoed so that someone looking over my shoulder can't read it and use it to bill time to my account.

I call this old-fashioned because with more modern hardware and software my computer could handle everything up to this point by itself. The computer would dial the number, listen for the beep tone, and give all the desired responses. More modern modems also

scan through the system at 1200 baud, instead of the rather slow 300 baud allowed by my old Omnitec.

After signing on, the first of many menus comes up and directs the user toward the system's four general areas of interest—Home Services, Business & Financial, Personal Computing, Services for Professionals—or to helpful User Information and Index files. You can also opt to see the results from a survey of readers of CompuServe's magazine, *Today*.

I hadn't used the service for a long time, so I had to reinstate my CompuServe account. And since it had been so long, the system didn't know what kind of equipment I was using. To play it safe, the system wisely transmitted everything to me in capital letters only (some computers can't handle lower case) and in chunks about 31 characters wide (some computers can't handle more than 32—some handle even less!).

Upper-case-only lettering can be hard to read, and having stuff fill only half my screen wasted valuable (and expensive) time by doubling the number of lines that scrolled up past my eyes. Then I remembered that you can change the terminal "default" settings with a program called "DEFAULT." Soon the system knew to send me upper and lower case at 64-character-width, now and hereafter. (I could also have changed my defaults temporarily—if I'd been working on another computer, for example.) Then it was back to the main menu.

CompuServe is "menu-driven," which means that it gives you small menus for everything. For example, picking option 3 (Personal Computing on the main menu) accessed a new menu with six more options (News, Reference, Communications, Shop at Home, Groups and Clubs, Programmer's Area), picking option 2 (Reference) accessed another menu, and so on.

This does not mean that you have to spend your time and money reading menus—not after you learn the system, anyway. Each new menu, section, or subsection has a page number, and you can go directly to a page by typing in its number and a command (for example, "GO KCS-4").

That particular example shows up the

system's diversity. It's the sub-menu for "The National Satirist," a humor column which I find less funny than a rubber bridge truss. On the other hand, there must be those who love it—it survives. Obviously, CompuServe was designed for nearly everyone and not for me alone.

The Break key comes in handy here. Don't like what you've got? Hit Break and interrupt it, then GO to a page you know you like, flip back to the last menu, jump to the next (or previous) item on that menu, or go all the way back to Menu 1—all with single-letter commands.

After "The National Satirist," I went back to HOM-1 (the first menu for Home Services), called option 3 (Communications), and was in one of the most popular menus on the service. Here my options were: Electronic Mail (user-to-user messages, addressed by ID number); CB Simulation (more on this in a minute); National Bulletin Board (public messages which can be scanned by date or by keyword—you can leave your own, too); User Directory (for finding users' ID numbers, if memory serves—I didn't try it this trip); Talk to Us (communicating with CompuServe itself); Lobby Letters of America (sends letters you write to your representatives in government); Ask Aunt Nettie (advice column); and CB Society (haven't checked this one out yet).

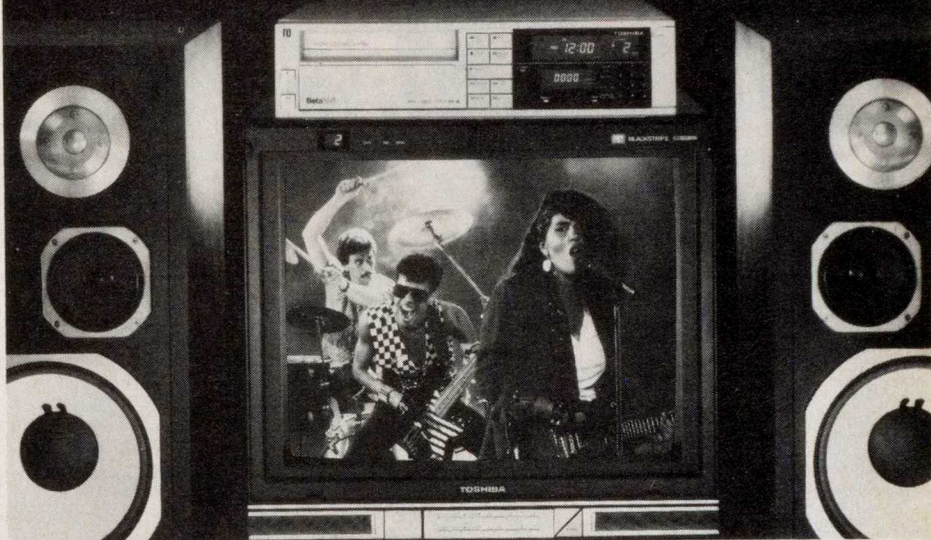
I'd been hearing a lot about CB Simulation but hadn't tried it, so I punched for option 2. Just like Citizens Band radio, it's an anarchic meeting of the minds and voices, all talking in real time to one another. It differs from radio in several pleasant ways: First, its scope is national, so you can talk to users anywhere in the U.S. and Canada. Second, you can't be *totally* anonymous—you sign in with a "handle," which automatically becomes part of any message you send. In addition, you can "squench" individual talkers on the band so that their transmissions simply won't show up on your screen, hold private (even scrambled) conversations with selected people, monitor up to two channels besides the one you're "tuned" to and can talk on, and, finally, you can leave private messages for a friend to pick up when they sign on later.

I've heard fascinating tales about the chit-chat on CompuServe's CB. All I've run across so far is lots of "Hi, there!" messages, and the news that someone who lives across the street from one system user is restoring a '67 Vette. (Ho-hum.)

Two strikes, so far—but there was still plenty there (enough for almost everyone), and some that I did find intriguing. At last, I found my home on CompuServe among the Special Interest Groups, or "SIGs" for short.



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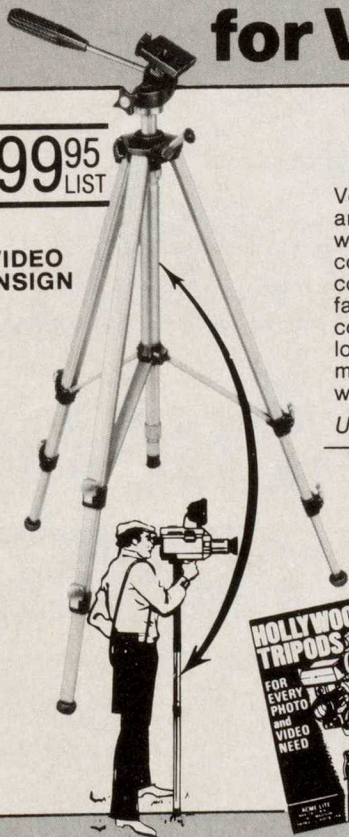
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